

Statement of Senator Ron Wyden Hearing on Title IX and Science

This afternoon the Subcommittee on Science, Technology and Space convenes the third in a series of hearings on the subject of women studying and working in math, technology, engineering and the so-called hard sciences such as physics and chemistry.

Congress may not be able to legislate away the entrenched attitudes of the math and science establishment, that women are somehow second-class scholars in these fields. But as Chair of the Subcommittee on Science, Technology and Space, I'm determined to see the Title IX statute fully enforced to give women equal opportunity in science, engineering and math education.

As one of today's witnesses knows, the enforcement of that common-sense rule has brought women much closer to parity – if not all the way – in high school and college sports. In my view, if Title IX can do that on the playing field it should certainly do so in the classroom, where its help was originally directed. Making sure that Title IX protects women in and out of the sports arena is more important now than ever before, as the Administration fires up a commission to review and possibly revise Title IX rules.

In June of this year, I laid down a new challenge in this Subcommittee. In this hearing room, I called on NASA Administrator Sean O'Keefe to determine how his agency could help *triple* the number of women graduating and working in math, science, and technology. At a hearing in July, Dean Kristina Johnson of Duke University's Pratt School of Engineering encouraged the enforcement of Title IX to ensure equal opportunity for women in math, science and engineering education.

Title IX states a simple principle. The entire statute reads: "No person in the United States shall on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."

The evidence of discrimination against women in math, science and engineering education is both empirical and anecdotal. The numbers will raise your eyebrows, but the stories should raise your hackles. Pregnant PhD students have been told they might as well give up their studies. According to the National Research Council, young women studying science and math are pushed into traditional female roles such as teaching, while their male counterparts receive almost all the research fellowships that pay more completely for graduate school.

Without a research background, women are less likely to obtain tenure-track faculty positions. They earn less money and lose the chance to encourage more young women. And the discrimination doesn't stop with students; full professors who happen to be women tell stories of losing their lab space to associate professors who are male.

The consequences of this systematic discrimination are immediately visible for women, and more subtly damaging to our country as a whole. The Hart-Rudman Commission on National Security warned that America's failure to invest in science and to reform math and science education is the second biggest threat to our national security. Only the threat of a weapon of mass destruction in an American city is a greater danger. Yet in essence, 51 percent of the population is being actively discouraged from entering these fields that desperately need new experts and practitioners.

Last week the Commerce Committee approved an amendment I offered with Senator Cleland. The amendment calls for a 10-year retrospective report on NSF programs to promote participation of women, minorities, and persons with disabilities in science and engineering. This week, I will offer another amendment to the NSF authorization bill. I want the National Academy of Sciences to report on how universities support their math, science and engineering *faculty* with respect to Title IX. This can cover hiring, promotion, tenure, even allocation of lab space.

The Federal government should share some of the spotlight. I will request that the Academy's report also detail how many Federal grants for scientific research are given to men and women and why. It's time Congress quantified and qualified the realities facing women in the sciences. Only then can we find fully effective solutions.